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Abstract

The standard English design of playing cards has been little altered over the centuries, and originated in the reign of Henry VII. It consists, of course, of the suits of diamonds, spades, hearts and clubs, with kings, queens and knaves for court cards. During the Restoration, however, and following European precedent, it was discovered by both Puritans and Royalists that playing cards could be used for educational purposes. This was done by simply modifying their standard patterns to leave room for the desired information. Disreputable 'gaming' was thus transformed into basic learning. As Virginia Wayland, an authority on seventeenth-century educational cards, has put it: 'Puritanical England was a fertile field for these cards that "were not cards" in the traditional pattern. For a populace just escaping from the severe discipline of the Commonwealth, here was a way to salve the conscience and still indulge in a popular pastime.' 1 The British, nevertheless, went one better than the Europeans by also inventing political playing cards. These included such gems of satirical diatribe as 'The Horrid Popish Plot' (1678) and 'The South Sea Bubble' (1720).

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Our chief concern here is with the educational playing cards. These covered a wide variety of subjects, including Astronomy, Geometry, Geography and even 'How to Carve at the Table'. Sylvia Mann, to whom our categorization of non-standard cards is indebted, labels these as 'diverting', and includes packs dealing with proverbs and love-mottoes.[2] Later still, in the early part of the nineteenth century, a subcategory of 'diverting' packs, 'transformation' cards, became very popular.

Africa and Africans featured in all three kinds of non-standard packs, but particularly so in educational cards devoted to geographical information and, in a much cruder way, as will be discussed later, 'transformation' packs. Geographical cards tell us much about how the British and, indeed, Europeans in general, viewed Africans in the early stages

of the colonial era. Geographical cards provided a popular medium of information about them. Judging by the frequency with which they were reprinted, in fact, geographical cards were very popular, and quite likely attempted to satisfy a great hunger for information - and 'easy learning' - in an age of exciting new geographical discoveries for Europeans. One publisher of such cards, John Lenthall, in an 'Advertisement' which was included in the two extra cards in a pack of geographical cards had this to say about their usefulness: 'The great & Infinite Benefit of obtaining and Retaining a System of Universal Geography so easily Pleasantly, & Familiarly, is so apparent as not to need any Argument to Perswasion.'

Invariably, one of the two 'black' suits, spades or clubs, represented Africa, and Lenthall's pack was no exception: 'The four Suits are the four Parts of the World; and not without Some Reason or Analogy, the Hearts describe Europe, the Diamonds Asia, the Spades, Africa, and the Clubs America, or the West Indies.' 'Not without Some Reason or Analogy' tells us that there was nothing arbitrary about the choice of suits. Europe was evidently considered the heartland. The suit of diamonds perhaps alludes to the fabled wealth associated with the East - and this was an age of much profitable trade with Asia. It may also perhaps suggest the hard-heartedness of the Islamic East, in contrast to the supposed warm-heartedness of the Christian West. In the case of the suit of spades, however, there can be little doubt that the suit stands for the skin colour of the African inhabitants it represents. This may also be true of the suit of clubs, since the West Indies and much of the Americas were populated by African slaves.

The game of ombre in the second, enlarged edition of Alexander Pope's 'The Rape of the Lock' (1714) provides a good example of how the 'black' suits readily lent themselves to such associations even among the 'polite' readers of that mock-epic poem. When Belinda declares 'Let Spades be trumps!', for instance, the spades turn out to be 'swarthy Moors'. The game proceeds as follows:

> Now move to War her Sable *Matadores*,
> In Show like Leaders of the swarthy *Moors*.
> *Spadillio* first, unconquerable Lord!
> Led off two captive Trumps, and swept the Board.
> (Canto III, ll. 46-50)

The association of spades with Africans was deliberate, for the card-game is described in mock-epic terms as a military battle; hence, this annotation in Twickenham edition of the poem: '...African warrior tribes are mentioned in the *Aeneid* and in Lucan's *Civil War*, iv 676 ff. Claudian's unfinished *De Bello Gildonico* deals with war in Africa.

Memnon (Dryden's *Aeneid*, i 1052) is called "swarthy".'[3] Belinda goes on to defeat both her opponents, but not before the Baron temporarily gains the upper-hand, as described in these lines:

> Now to the *Baron* Fate inclines the Field.
> His warlike *Amazon* her host invades,
> Th' Imperial Consort of the Crown of *Spades*.
> The *Club*'s black Tyrant first her Victim dy'd.
> Spite of his haughty Mien, and barb'rous Pride:
> What boots the Regal Circle on his Head,
> His Giant Limbs in State unwieldy spread?
> That long behind he trails his pompous Robe,
> And of all Monarchs only grasps the Globe?
> (Canto III, ll. 66-74)

Here, Pope describes the standard design of the king of clubs at the time, as he was the only one of the four kings holding an orb. In calling him a 'black Tyrant', however, Pope also alludes, according to Geoffrey Tillotson in the Twickenham edition, to 'the rout at the defeat of Hannibal by Scipio at Zama in North Africa'.[4] That epic descriptions of ancient wars in North Africa were in Pope's mind becomes even more evident at the climax of the Baron's ascendancy:

> Of *Asia*'s Troops, and *Africk*'s Sable Sons,
> With like Confusions different Nations fly,
> Of various Habit and of various Dye,
> The perc'd Battalions dis-united fall,
> In Heaps on Heaps; one Fate o'erwhelms them all.
> (Canto III, ll. 81-86)

It is always a treacherous undertaking to speculate on the sources of creativity, particularly in a poet of genius like Pope, yet it may not be too far-fetched to conclude that the great Augustan's imagination was stimulated by geographical packs, since it was in these cards that each suit represented a continent, and quite likely stirred the imagination of those who used them, whether children or adults, aristocrats or commoners. Also, though one must be careful not to end up breaking a butterfly upon a wheel, Pope's description of the game of ombre strongly suggests an epic struggle between the forces of 'civilization' and 'barbarism'. This struggle is mirrored in mock-epic fashion in the poem itself, since it focuses upon the 'barbarous' act of the cutting-off of Belinda's lock of hair. It appears, then, that assumptions about race and skin-colour, though not as blatantly racialist as they were to become in the nineteenth century, were perhaps subliminally reinforced even in standard packs.

As far as geographical cards are concerned, in the Restoration and early eighteenth century two basic designs circulated, one published by Henry Winstanley, and the other by H. Brome in 1675, and subsequently published in somewhat different versions, notably that of 1720, by John Lenthall. H. Brome's version itself was, in Sylvia Mann's words, 'filched from a French pack made by Duval in 1669'.[5] In the fascinating way it treats Africans, the Winstanley edition of geographical cards is by far the most interesting. The Winstanley cards, therefore, will be examined first.

THE WINSTANLEY GEOGRAPHICAL CARDS

Engraved from copper plates, the Winstanley cards were undoubtedly the most beautifully designed of the period. Henry Winstanley himself was an engineer at Audley's End, one of the estates of Charles II, and the cards were published in Littlebury, Essex, which was probably where Winstanley lived. Virginia Wayland, who wrote a monograph about the cards, makes the following pertinent observations about them:

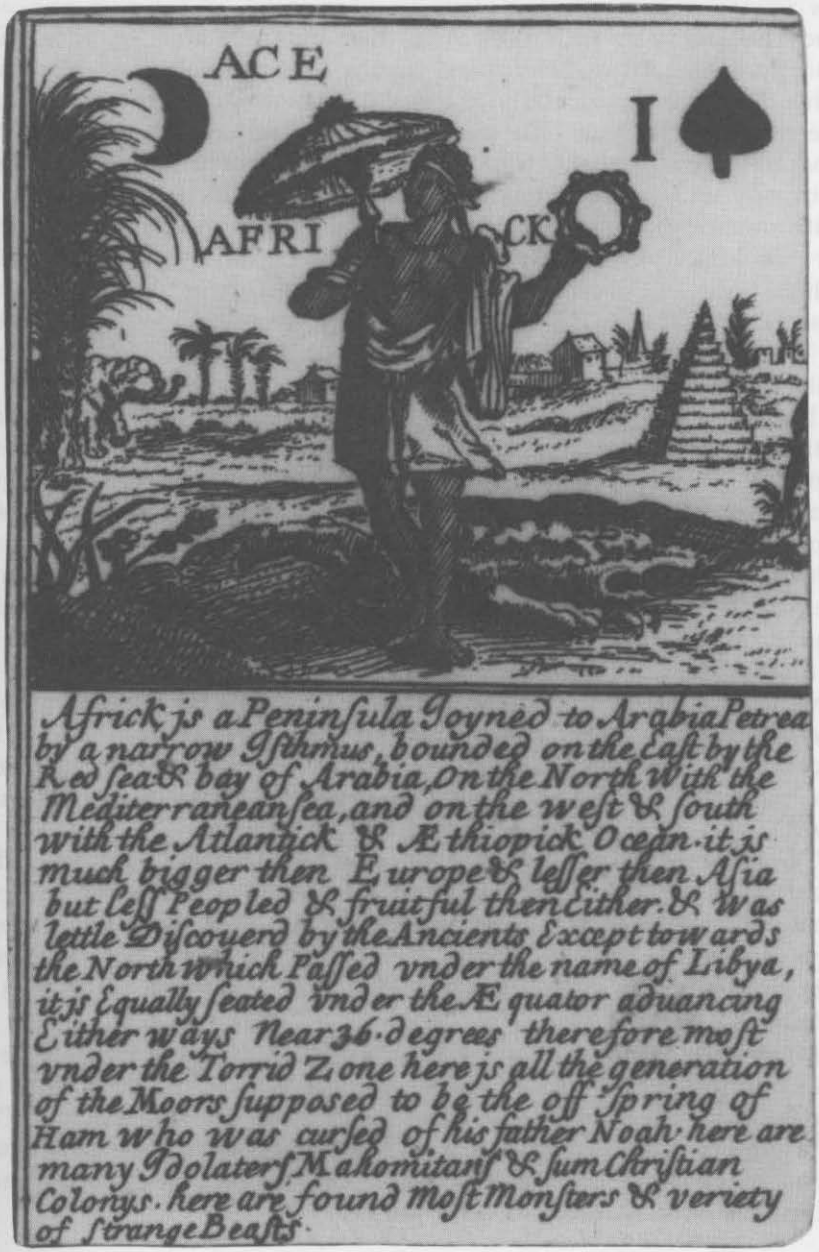
> I am sure that it was not an easy task to design such a deck of cards - using only half of each card for text. ... We know so many facts about our world that it would be almost impossible to choose the few items about each country that could be recorded on a scrap of paper the size of a playing card. Therefore it becomes not only interesting but significant to see what economic, political and cultural facts in the 17th century Winstanley felt would interest the merchants and political figures of the busy, commercially expanding city of London.[6]

The emphasis on empirical facts is certainly there in Winstanley's own description (in the frontispiece which came with the cards) of what he intended to include in his design:

> All the Principal Nations of the World Presented in their Habits (or Fashion of Dressing) with a Prospect of their Capital Citys and a Geographycal Description of the Provinces and Citys and Remarkable Places, in and Belonging or Depending to Ech Government with an observation of their Fruitfulness, Trading, Religions and as much of History of all, as Could be Contained in so small a Space.

Much of the information supplied by the cards, however, was not strictly factual, but derived from the Bible and ancient history. In the case of the African suit, particularly, it will be argued, the cards are just as significant for the images of Africans they convey, as for the strictly factual information they impart.

Winstanley goes on to explain in the same frontispiece that each of the four suits represents a continent, with each continent also having its



Ill. 1: Ace of Spades
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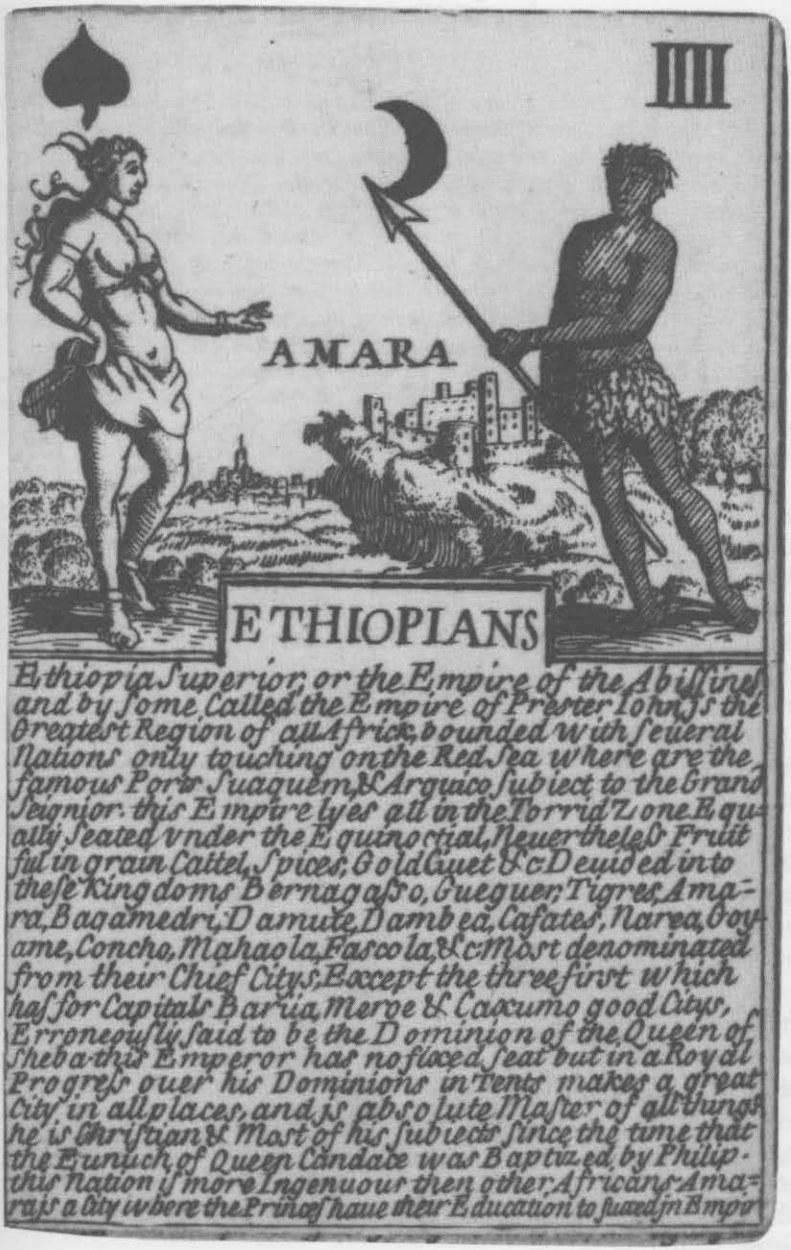
own extra symbol. Thus, Europe is represented by the suit of hearts, and associated also with roses; Asia, diamonds and suns; America, clubs and stars; and Africa, spades and moons. One can only speculate about why the moon, particularly a crescent one, was chosen but just as a crescent moon reveals only part of its entire surface, so did Europeans undoubtedly feel that Africa was largely unknown to them. In both astrology and poetic symbolism, moreover, the moon was associated with mutability, or the process of cyclical change in Nature, suggested by the lunar phases. Africa was perhaps considered as a continent where time was cyclical rather than historical for its inhabitants. It is also possible that Africa was regarded as a mainly 'Pagan' area, a kind of battle ground between Christians and Muslims, the symbol of Islam being a crescent moon.

To start with the ace of spades, it gives general information about Africa as a continent, emphasizing that it 'was little Discovered by the Ancients'. About its people, it has this to say: '... here is all the generation of the Moors supposed to be the off-spring of Ham who was cursed of his father Noah. here are many Idolaters. Mahomitans & sum Christian Colonys. here are found Most Monsters & veriety of strange Beasts.' The description seems to contain in embryo the essence of later, and in many ways continuing, European perceptions of Africa; that it is a stronghold of Islam, of Paganism, or 'primitive' religions and fertile ground for Christian missionary activity. There is also a strong echo of the Renaissance cartographers' 'here be monsters' for blank areas of the world map. This anticipates the later European fascination with wildlife, mirrored in many a safari-park and wildlife documentary film even now.

The accompanying illustration appears to depict an 'idolater' rather than a Moor. The man holding a parasol, and a tambourine, is evidently a black man from south of the Sahara, with the 'prospect' of a typical village behind him, even though he is flanked by a pyramid. His pose suggests that he is about to dance, perhaps in some kind of 'idolatrous' ceremony.

Much of the textual information in many of the cards tends to be of an exotic nature, at least to Europeans. The two of spades informs us, for instance that in Nubia 'is found a sort of Poison that the tenth Part of a grain will kill a man in the quarter of an hour'. Most flamboyant of all is the description of Ethiopia in the four of spades, which must be quoted in its entirety to do it justice:



Ill. 2: Four of Spades

FOUR OF SPADES

ETHIOPIANS - Amara

Ethiopia Superior, or the Empire of the Abissines and by Some Called the Empire of Prester Iohn is the Greatest Region of all Africk, bounded with several Nations only touching on the Red Sea where are the famous Ports Suaquem, & Arquico subject to the Grand Seignior. this Empire lyes all in the Torrid Zone Equally Seated vnder the Equinoctial. Neuertheless Fruitful in grain Cattel, Spices, Gold Ciuet &c: Deuided into these Kingdoms Bernagasso, Gueguer, Tigres, Amara, Bagamedri, Damute, Dambea, Cafates, Narea, Goyame, Concho, Mahaola, Fascola, &c: Most denominated from their Chief Citys, Except the three first which has for Capitals Bariia, Meroe & Caxumo good Citys Erroneously said to be the Dominion of the Queen of Sheba. this Emperor has no fixed seat but in a Royal Progress ouer his Dominions in Tents makes a great City in all places, and is absolute Master of all things. he is absolute Master of all things. he is Christian & Most of his subjects since the time that the Eunuch of Queen Candace was Baptized by Philip. this Nation is more Ingenuous then other Africans. Amara is a City where the Princes haue their Education to succed in Empire...

This description, with its mixture of myth, legend and fact, was evidently meant to fire the imagination of the reader and, particularly in its listing of exotic products, has almost biblical resonance. As for the phrase, 'this Nation is more ingenuous than other Africans', it reveals that the Ethiopian empire commanded more respect than any other African kingdom from Europeans, apparently because it was officially Christian, and of ancient provenance. The word 'ingenuous' is particularly revealing because though according to the *OED* it currently means 'honourably straightforward; open, frank, candid', in the seventeenth century it *also* meant 'of free or honourable birth; free-born' and 'noble in nature, character, or disposition; generous, high-minded'. As for the legendary Queen Candace, she also appears as a medallion portrait, but of an evidently white woman, in some of the geographical cards published by John Lenthall.

In the accompanying illustration, which does not quite match up to the colourful text, a soldier armed with a spear, and guarding a citadel, appears to challenge a half-naked white woman with long, flowing hair. One could take Winstanley at his word, and assume that the couple are typical Ethiopians in national costume but, like most of the couples in these cards, they seem to be more emblematic than ethnographically accurate. In this particular case, the couple may represent European (particularly because the woman is white and 'unarmed') or English diplomatic attempts to become more influential in that inaccessible empire.

It is part of the artistic design of all these cards, in fact, that each one, apart from the four aces, portrays a man and a woman, in various states of implied harmony or opposition. One of the most striking 'har-

Ill. 3: Six of Spades

monious' pairs is the five of spades, about the 'Cafrerians', which describes what now roughly corresponds to South Africa. On the right is a warrior in full gear, but relaxed pose, and on the left a mother holding a baby. There is a similar illustration in the six of spades, which depicts the 'Congoans', but here the illustration seems to be in ironic counterpoint to the text, which mentions the following: 'a great Part is subject to Portugal who Possess the Royal City of St Saluador & haue strong fortresses in the Citys of Massagan & Cambambe and in the Isle of Loando, who furnish from hence slaues for Brasil.'

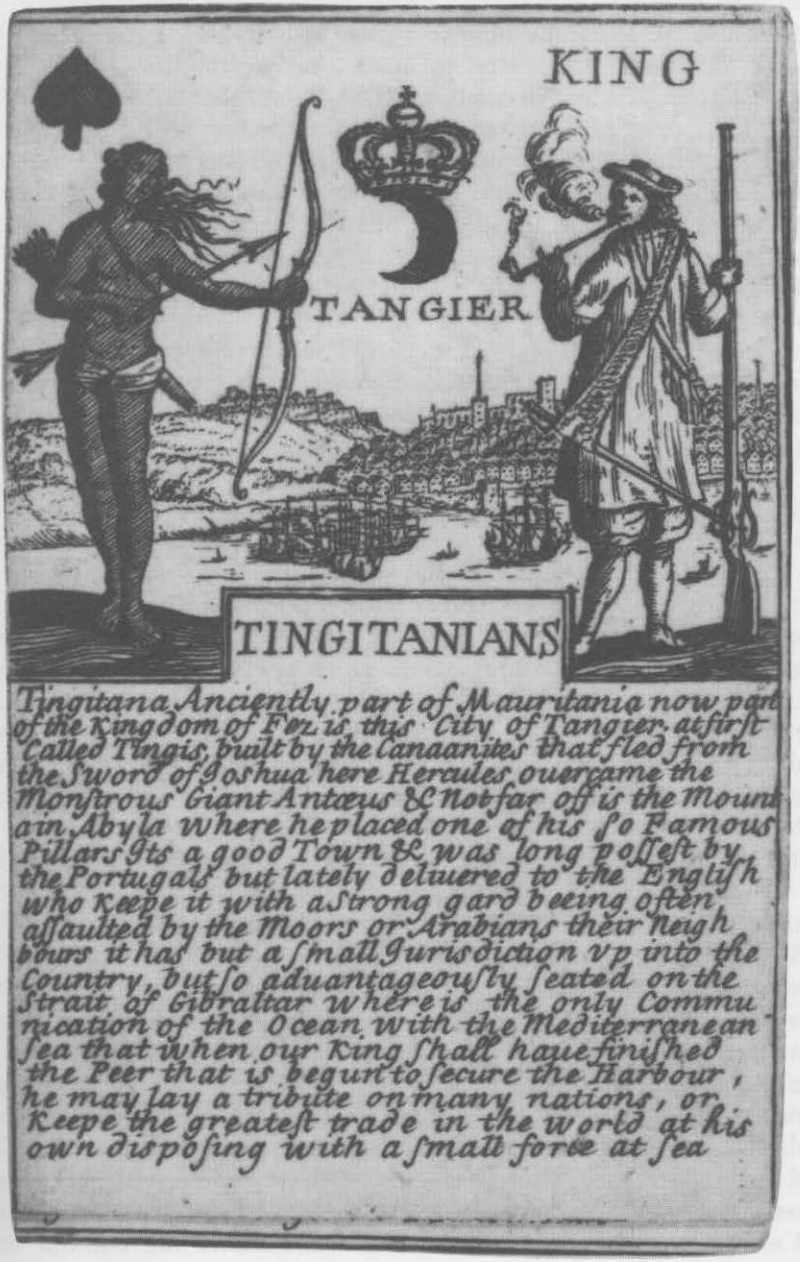
As in the five of spades, the warrior, who wields a battle-axe, seems to be in a state of battle readiness to protect his wife and child, and it is easy to imagine that their enemies are the slave-hunters, whether this was intended or not. Both cards, in any case, depict Africans as sturdy warriors ready to defend their immediate families rather than alien aggressors, and the poses are not unlike those of heroic military portraits and battle scenes of the time.

Other cards contain solid historical information both about the activities of European traders and colonizers, and about exclusively African political events. The king of spades is a good example of the former, and the three of spades of the latter.

The king of spades, which indicates Tangier, depicts a white soldier fully armed, smoking a long pipe with his left hand, and holding the muzzle of a musket with his right arm. He looks completely nonchalant and self-confident. To his right is an Amazonian black woman, with hair blowing in the wind, and holding a bow-and-arrow, but in a rather tentative manner. She looks remarkably like a Botticelli Venus. In the distance lies Tangier, its harbour teeming with ships.

No more fitting emblem of colonial self-confidence could have been devised. Tangier had been, in fact, acquired by Charles II for Britain as part of the dowry of Catherine of Braganza; hence, perhaps, the playfully erotic associations of the illustration. The text itself, however, reveals the precariousness of the strategic base: '... beeing often assaulted by the Moors or Arabians their Neighbours it has but small Iurisdiction up into the Country' and it was, in fact, eventually abandoned.

The three of spades, on Mozambique, is quite detailed on political events not directly affected by Europeans. It tells us that 'In Avan is the Kingdoms & Seaports of Braua & Magadozo with the Inland Realms of Adea & Adel. This last part was formerly of the Empire of the Abissines, but of late Rebelling they doe Maintaine their own gouernments ... to both Empires.' Read as a sequence, then, the cards provide an historical account in miniature of colonial penetration and indigenous politics in Africa.



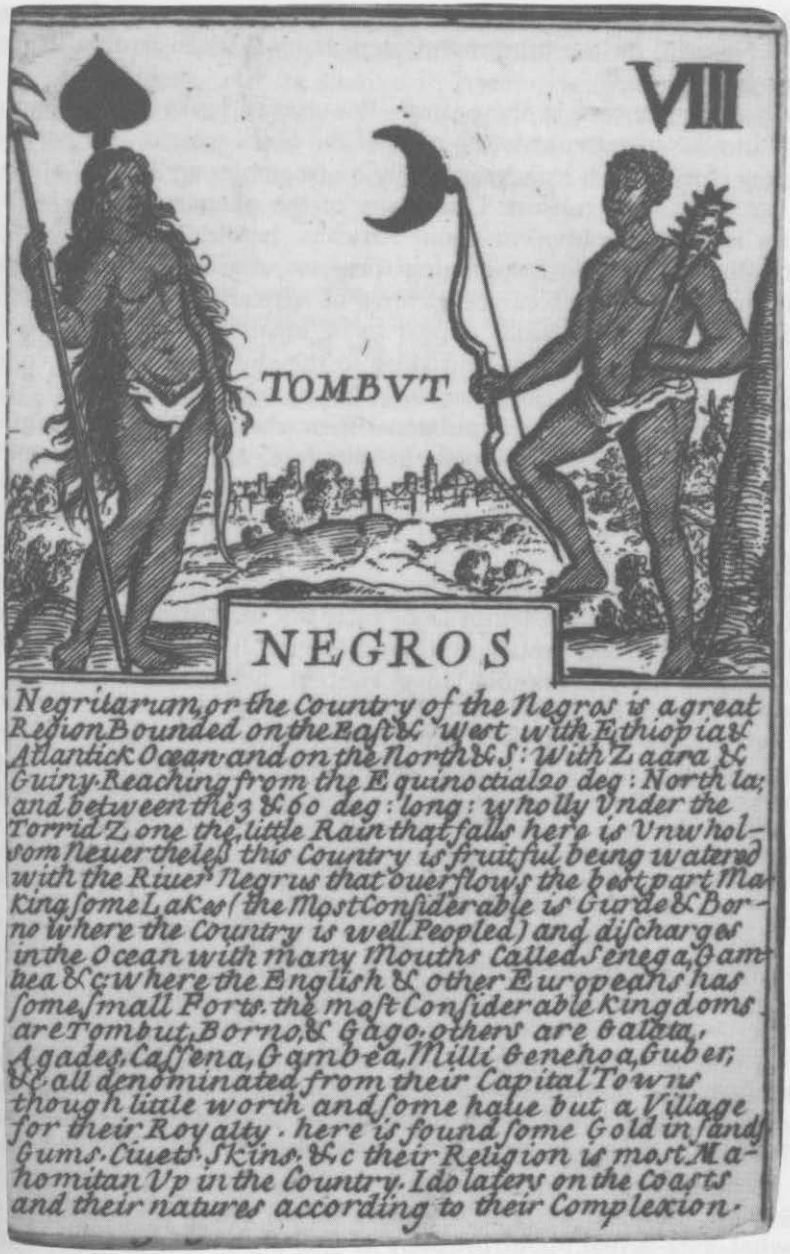
Ill. 4: King of Spades

Many of the cards also make copious references to Biblical events, and ancient history. Thus, the nine of spades tells us that Egypt is 'famous for the Israelites going dry to it, & the destruction of so many Egiptians', and the ten of spades, about Tunis, that 'this City did rise out of the ruines of Carthage formerly Competitor with Rome'. In the queen of spades, which depicts Morocco, the strong sense of Mediterranean Africa and its historical links with the ancient world spills over into the accompanying illustration, for the black man ready to hurl a spear wears a Roman tunic, and the lighter-skinned woman holding a military banner, though only half-dressed, seems to be in Roman military uniform.

In general, the North African cards, which comprise the nine of spades to the queen of spades, compare past glories with present squalors. The knave of spades, for instance, tells us that in 'Biledulgerid ... antiently called Lybia ... was the Temple of Iupiter Ammon famous for its Oracles and the admirable Fountain of the Sun' but now the country is made up of 'Inhabitants which are Barbarous & Inhumane', 'great Deserts Sandy & full of scorpions & wild Beasts', concluding that 'all is devided in Petite States this Country not being thought a great Monarchs Subduing'. The knavish figures on the card, a black woman holding a triangular parasol, and her protector, an armed white man who looks over his shoulder, while wearing what looks like a fool's cap, interestingly enough both resemble the 'fool' figure in Tarot cards. The 'fool' in Tarot games was worth nothing. On the whole, the couples in the cards illustrating North Africa tend to be light-skinned, or one black and one lighter skinned, thus emphasizing the mixture of races in Mediterranean Africa.

The cards dealing with West Africa have some of the most disparaging comments in their texts. They comprise the seven and eight of spades. The seven of spades ('Guinys') mentions Moors who 'are Rude & Barbarous, Thiefs. and most Idolaters', and concludes with 'the Rest little worth the Naming'. Yet this moralistic judgment is immediately vitiated by a description of Christians, which now reads very ironically, providing unwitting evidence of how far the slave-trade was not at all considered as a moral issue: 'Although the Europeans has here Many Christian colonys, Trading with them for Gold, Ivory. Rice Cotton Skins Amber-greice. Parrats. Monkeys. Slaues. & a sort of Pepper. &c.' The card portrays a naked black woman with very long hair bringing a parasol to a spear-carrying guard. They seem to be emblematic of peace and shelter, for the panorama behind them shows the harbour of St George De La Mina.

The text of the eight of spades concludes even more disparagingly: 'Idolaters on the Coasts and their natures according to their Com-



Ill. 5: Eight of Spades

plexion', The accompanying illustration to 'Negritarum, or the Country of the Negros', on the other hand, depicts an African couple in rather heroic light.

As is often the case in these cards, the woman looks Amazonian, but she is in relaxed pose, as is the pose of the black warrior. As he wields a spikey club, in fact, iconographically he resembles an African Hercules and his Venus-like consort. Like many of the other cards, the eight of spades is rather ambivalent about Africans, heroically idealizing them in the illustration, and disparaging them to some extent in the text.

Far from providing accurate pictures of Africans in national costume at the time, the illustrations appear to be idealizations of African men and women in heroic pose, and close to the state of nature. A concept of the 'noble savage' does not lurk far behind in these cards, even though it was not fully formulated till much later by Rousseau. The postures of the African couples, at any rate, are evidently based on classical and baroque notions of gracefulness and heroic pose. Above all, the illustrations are undoubtedly in playful counterpoint to the texts. It appears, then, that the illustrations were probably meant to be more entertaining than enlightening about the inhabitants of Africa. The texts, on the other hand, do attempt to be factually informative and accurate, though they deal with much myth and legend. It is likely that Winstanley's patron, the Honourable James Herbert, helped with the texts. As Virginia Wayland puts it:

> His factual knowledge must have been of considerable help and a great source of security to Winstanley who does not appear to have had a formal education. Since Herbert was an Oxford graduate, it seems unlikely that he would have been as careless about punctuation, spelling, and sentence structure as is found in the text on the cards. It seems probable, therefore, that Winstanley wrote the final text based on the facts provided by Herbert.[7]

The instructive purpose of these cards, particularly for children, is confirmed by Winstanley in the aforementioned frontispiece:

> ... I shall not use many Arguments to Perswade how advantageous they May be to all Persons that will bear in mind what is said in few Words of so great a subject. ... And to make them profitable to a youth that shall desire them, I woold give the one by one to him as he shall have Learn't them by heart.

The great value of the Winstanley cards now, however, rests not only in what they reveal about the state of knowledge and presuppositions about Africa, and other continents, at the time, but also in the way a whole mental landscape can be charted from perusing them. It is almost as if they were a kind of Tarot pack, with symbols to be decoded. But

ambivalence about man in the 'state of nature', as represented by Africans, is what the Winstanley cards communicate most strongly.

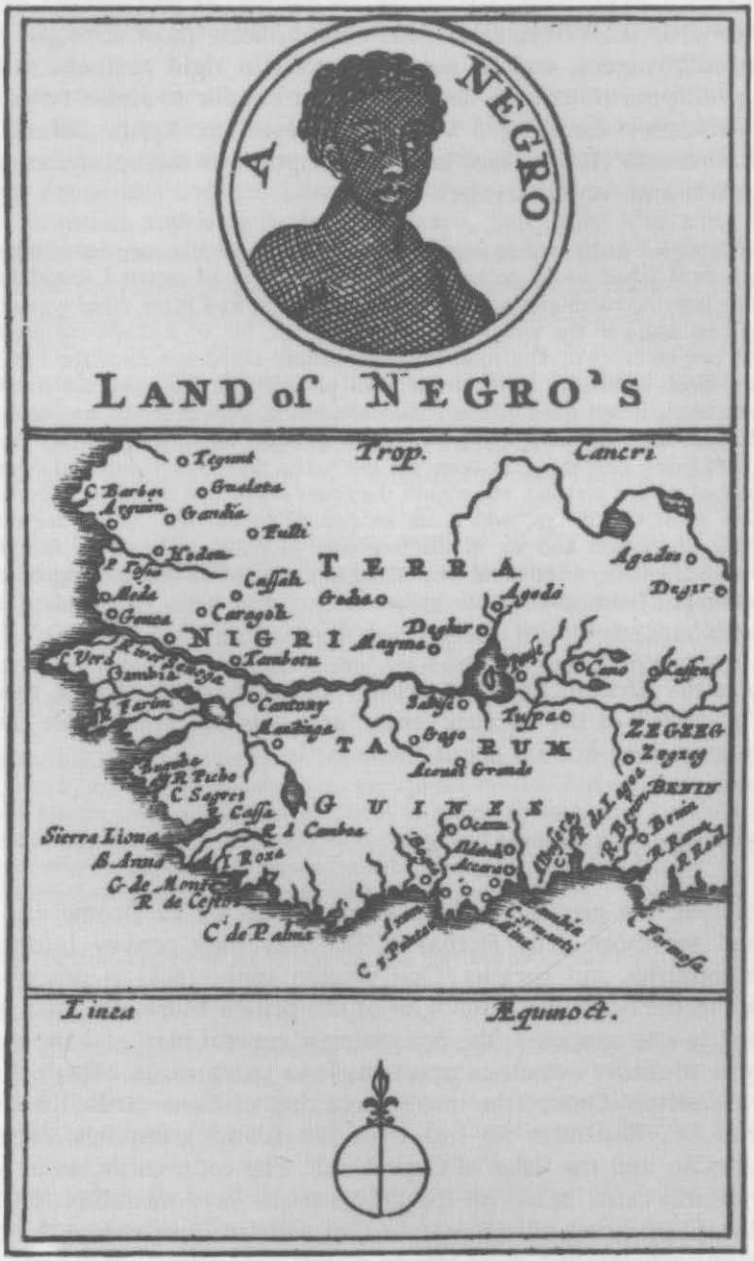
This ambivalence, and its sources in certain rigid aesthetic and cultural presuppositions of a neo-classic cast similar to those reflected in the Winstanley cards, was vividly conveyed in Aphra Behn's short novel, *Oroonoko* (1688). Here is her description of the eponymous African prince and 'noble savage':

> But though I had heard so much of him, I was as greatly surprized when I saw him, as if I had heard nothing of him; so beyond all report I found him. He came into the room and addressed himself to me, and some other women, with the best grace in the world. He was pretty tall, but of a shape the most exact that can be fancy'd: The most famous statuary cou'd not form the figure of a man more admirably turn'd from head to foot. His face was not that brown rusty black which most of that nation are, but of perfect ebony, or polished jett. His eyes were the most awful that cou'd be seen, and very piercing; the white of 'em being like snow, as were his teeth. His nose was rising and *Roman*, instead of *African* and flat. His mouth the finest shape that could be seen; far from those great turn'd lips, which are so natural to the rest of the negroes. The whole proportion and air of his face was so nobly and exactly form'd, that bating his colour, there could be nothing in nature more beautiful, agreeable and handsome. There was no one grace wanting, that bears the standard of true beauty.[8]

Many of the Africans depicted in the Winstanley cards, in fact, resemble Behn's portrait of the African prince, and it is not improbable that the writer may have known about these cards.

OTHER GEOGRAPHICAL PLAYING-CARDS

By contrast, the geographical packs published by H. Brome and John Lenthall are more drily factual in the way they convey information about countries and regions. One version (pub. 1661) is described as follows in the Schreiber Catalogue of the British Museum: 'Each suit is devoted to one continent, the ace giving a general map and the rest the different countries which compose it. Four extra cards contain lists of these countries.' One of the most interesting of these cards, the Roman numeral 'X', illustrates no less than ten island groupings, including Madagascar, and the 'Isles of Cape Verd'. The court-cards, as in all the geographical cards based on the Duval pack, have medallion portraits, Charles II appearing on the map of Great Britain. Invariably, the queen and king cards tended to be Queen Candace of Nubia, and Zaga Chris of Ethiopia, but these figures are more legendary than historical, and look more European than African. The knave of spades, as in this par-



Ill. 6: Knave of Spades

ticular pack, however, tended to be 'A Negro', and in this pack it illustrates 'West Africa'. Blacks, in other words, were never depicted as rulers of any sort, and the implications of this are obvious. That said, in a pack published in 1720, the knave of spades portrays a rather fine, and expressive African face.

Geographical knowledge advanced sufficiently for newly-designed sets of geographical cards to be produced in the later part of the eighteenth century. Compared to the Lenthall and Winstanley packs, though, they tend to be less interesting in design. One of these (pub. *circa* 1790) was called the 'Compendium of Geography'. In his book on *Old and Curious Playing Cards*, H.T. Morley describes the pack as follows:

> This is a pack of 52 cards, with the usual suits, Hearts, Diamonds, Spades and Clubs, shown at the top left-hand corner in a space about ¾ in. square, the rest of the card being closely printed with particulars of various countries pertaining to the four great continents. Hearts are for Europe, Clubs for Africa, Spades for Asia and Diamonds for America.[9]

The 'Preface', which was published as an extra card, just as in the case of some Lenthall packs, also echoes Lenthall in emphasizing the *pleasantly* educational function of the cards:

> While Guthrie's and other grammars instruct those only who have the opportunity to study; this compendium is calculated to give those who have not much time to read, (and particularly young persons at school) a general acquaintance with the bigness, boundaries, population, capitals, lat. and lon. distance from London, islands, rivers, lakes, mountains, climates, productions, agriculture, manufactures, trades, government, religion, customs, learning, and curiosities of every kingdom or state in the world, in an easy, sausory manner...[10]

The puzzling word 'sausory' may be a corruption of 'saucery' or, according to the *OED*, 'that part of the household where sauces are made'. The author of the 'Preface' seems to have meant that the cards provide a kind of 'sauce' to enliven dry geographical facts. In keeping with the spirit of the Enlightenment, the cards do indeed tabulate a large number of empirical facts. As a result, they are more prosaic than any earlier geographical pack, particularly the Winstanley cards. They are certainly 'closely printed', like a miniature encyclopedia, and with no pictorial relief to relax the eye, so it is open to doubt whether schoolboys really enjoyed these. The author, however, was determined to be scientifically accurate, declaring in a note to the 'Preface': 'Should the scientific discover any inaccuracies, their candour will ascribe them to some pardonable cause; & that of the public will graciously accept the labours of the author, as an evidence of his good-will towards mankind.'[10] The cards, then, do treat Africa and Africans very objectively

though occasionally a tone of cultural superiority creeps in. The four of spades, for instance, tells us about Egypt: 'Relig. Mahom. and tho' it was once the seat of arts and sciences, there scarce remains a vestige of it among the present inhabitants'. Even more disparagingly, the three of clubs, on Morocco, informs us: 'Its government can scarcely be said to exist.'

In the nineteenth century geographical cards were more elaborately designed, and often aimed at a more exclusive clientele than during the Restoration and eighteenth century. This is the impression one gets, at any rate, when reading the 'Prefatory Remarks' in the booklet accompanying geographical playing-cards published by Charles Hodges in 1827:

> In presenting the new Geographical Cards to the notice of the fashionable World, the publisher feels confident that he is supplying what has long been considered a desideratum by all persons of taste. Nothing can possibly be more grotesque and undignified, than the appearance of the kings and queens who have hitherto ruled with unrivalled sway in the realms of fashionable amusement, under the honourable denomination of Court Cards; so much so that, on beholding them, one cannot help wondering how they ever gained admission at any of the courts in Christendom. If the cards, here placed before the Public, possessed no other recommendation than that of supplanting these grim usurpers of regal honours, by tasteful and accurate representations of royalty's reality, they would have a very strong claim on the encouragement of the Fashionable World; but, presenting as they do, the additional advantage of instruction to the younger members of families, by means of the accuracy and beauty of the geographical engravings, (which are executed in the first style by an eminent artist) it is hoped that their utility cannot fail to be appreciated. The principal of the work is to make pleasure the handmaid of instruction, in order that the mind may be at the same time diverted and improved. The study of Geography possesses peculiar charms for the youthful mind, even in the earliest stages of its development; and, as the power of thought expands, our thirst for knowledge is in no way more delightfully gratified, than by an indulgence in this pleasing and instructive pursuit.

Hodges evidently echoes his predecessors in arguing for the usefulness of geographical cards, but he is more methodical in his argument, taking nothing as 'self-evident'. Also, he shows much more impatience with the standard design of playing-cards than Lenthall and Winstanley did, even obliquely suggesting that *his* cards could provide royalist propaganda to reassure the 'fashionable' world - as if standard court-cards were somehow too democratic! Above all, the consumer of these cards was definitely invited to regard them as high quality *artistic* products; and they were, indeed, expensive and literally gilt-edged. Hodges goes on to recommend his cards, again as his predecessors had done, for the educational benefit of children, arguing vehemently against

those who emulated the Puritans of the Restoration by condemning playing-cards as fit only for idlers. This time, however, the kill-joys seem to have been the Utilitarians:

> Cards, regarded as an amusement for the young, are frequently objected to by persons whose opinions are entitled to respect: they look upon them as forming too trivial an amusement, and as conducive to no end of real utility. It is presumed, that such objections will be effectually removed by the present publication, as it will insensibly render amusement the medium of information.

Learning, indeed, must have been helped by the colour-tinted engravings of maps in these cards, which are very beautilful.

Africa is illustrated in the ace of clubs, with a large club in its centre shaped like a shamrock and green, rather than the customary black, in colour. As for information about the countries depicted, Hodges included it in the booklet. The emphasis is very much on the political system of the various African countries, and fairly objective in tone, though more condescending compared to earlier geographical cards. The description for the five of clubs (Upper Guinea) provides one of the best examples:

> The Ashantee kingdom, situated to the west of Dahomey and the north of the Gold Coast, was not known to the Europeans before the beginning of the last century. The men are strong and healthy, and both sexes particularly clean in their persons. The gov't, though monarchical in form, is, in effect, aristocratic, the king being controlled by the chieftains and the assembly of captains. Benin is a country to the east of Dahomey, the climate of which is extremely noxious. The sovereign is an absolute despot. His majesty is said to have six hundred wives. Paganism is the religion of Benin.

The juxtaposition of the last two sentences may not have been coincidental. It reflects a more detached attitude to 'Paganism', despite the greater flurry of missionary activity in the nineteenth century, than that to be found in the Winstanley cards.

Changing perceptions of Africans by Europeans are especially evident in the court-cards for Africa. These continue the tradition of portraying legendary rather than contemporary rulers. The king of clubs is supposed to be Saladin, though he resembles a pharaoh rather more; the queen of clubs, Zulema of Algiers, a reclining odalisque shaking the claws of a bowing parrot in dazzling colour-scheme; the knave, Moroab of Morocco smoking a very long hashish pipe. In the court-cards, at least, if not in the accompanying booklet, the 'New Geographical Cards' pander to Romantic fantasies about Africans, and continue the tradition

of excluding blacks not only as rulers, but also as knaves, from the court-cards.

An earlier pack of thirty-two cards, published by John Wallis in 1803, and entitled 'A Geographical Description of the World embellished with the Dresses of the various Nations' records how images of Africans had become stereotyped. One card, on 'Hottentots', for instance, has an engraved, and colour-tinted, medallion portrait of a slave in chains, kneeling and praying with a terrified expression as he looks up at the sky. Though it is quite possible that Wallis was against the slave-trade, the medallion portrait offends against human dignity. The accompanying inscription certainly seems to be very negative about some Africans:

> The Country of the Hottentots is a large region in the southern extremity of Africa. The natives are extremely fond of hunting, in which exercise they shew great dexterity. They rear great numbers of sheep and oxen, but they neither sow nor plant, nor have they the least notion of agriculture. They besmear their bodies all over with fat mixed with soot, after which they perfume themselves with a powder of herbs, which they scatter over their heads and bodies, rubbing it all over them when they besmear themselves.

Such a description appears to be highly reductionist, and undoubtedly worlds away from the spirit of humanistic enquiry displayed in the Winstanley cards. It may be objected that, because it neither has suits, nor substitutes for them, this set cannot be classified as 'playing-cards', however educational, but it does testify to the success of geographical playing-cards, and therefore its kinship with them, since Wallis found it worthwhile to publish his purely educational version of geographical packs.

By the end of the nineteenth century Africa was portrayed as a kind of imperial playground, most notably in a pack of 'Geographical Whist' (pub. *circa* 1880). It was announced as follows in a leaflet accompanying the pack quoting from the 'Bournemouth Visitor's Directory': 'Amongst the many novelties which have been introduced to the public this season is a new game called "Geographical Whist", which has been invented and patented by Mrs M.E. Farwell, of Bournemouth and Poole.' The leaflet then goes on to describe the variations in design, and justification for making playing-cards educational tools, all echoes of predecessors like Lenthall, Winstanley and Hodges:

> Many persons, we know, object to the ordinary playing cards, even for use in games of the most simple and innocent character - games which they do not object to play with cards of a different design. In the new game, however, the four suits of hearts, clubs, diamonds and spades, have no existence, pictorial designs representing the four continents taking their places, and in the place of Ace, King, Queen, and Knave, appearing various representatives.

The representatives for Africa turn out to be Dr Moffat, famed Scottish missionary, for the 'ace' card, his son-in-law, David Livingstone, for the 'king', and H.M. Stanley for the 'knave'. These worthy white paternalists evidently replace the legendary royal personages in earlier court-cards representing Africa, even the 'knave' overthrowing dignified portraits of 'a Negro' for the journalist who found David Livingstone in 'darkest Africa', H.M. Stanley.

As for the minor cards, they display 'small pictorial illustrations of various towns'; 'Nubia', for instance, shows a panorama of steamship and dhow passing before Government House, virtually a fortress guarding Khartoum. These cards reflect how, for many Victorians at least, the age of exploration and enquiry was superseded by one of domination and imperial arrogance so far as Africa was concerned. The leaflet concludes confidently: 'Each suit has a different colour, Africa as "the dark continent" being of course printed in black.' Of course.

POLITICAL PLAYING-CARDS

Africans do not appear at all in the fiercely partisan political cards of the Restoration, and only very little in those of the eighteenth century. This is so even in the packs generated by the greatest financial scandal of the era - one heavily linked with the 'Assiento', or slave-trade in the Spanish Main - the bankruptcy of the South Sea Company. The two packs were 'The South Sea Bubble' and 'All the Bubbles: The Bubble Companies', both published in 1720. Both packs satirized the scramble for shares in dubious smaller enterprises financed by the South Sea Company. This is how the 'Weekly Packet' of 10 Dec., 1720 advertised the first pack:

> A New Pack of Stock-Jobbery Cards containing 52 Copper Cuts representing the Tricks of the Stock-Jobbers, Humours of Exchange Alley, and the Fate of Stock-Jobbing. With a Satyrical Epigram upon each Card, by the Author of the South-Sea Ballard and Bubble Cards. Spotted with their proper Colours, so that they may be play's with as well as Common Cards.

The advertisement also contained the following epigram:

> In future Times 'twill hardly be believ'd
> So wise an Age should be so deceiv'd,
> By empty Bubbles; but too late we find,
> That Avarice and Price have made us blind.[11]

All sorts of follies were certainly satirized but, ironically, not the slave-trade itself.

Two of the cards, however, reveal that black servants were hapless witnesses of how the Bubble corrupted personal relationships between their masters and mistresses. In the knave of hearts, one servant brings a billet-doux from his mistress to a beau in his study: 'Sr. Here is a Letter from Madam.' The beau replies: 'Carry it back again. Stock falls, tell her I'm not well.' The accompanying verse explains:

> A South Sea Lady having much improv'd,
> Her Fortune proudly Slighted him she Lov'd,
> But South Sea falling, sunk her Fortune low.
> She would have had him then, but he cry'd no.

In the ace of spades, we find a beau ready to leave the country, and telling his servant from his row-boat: 'Jack carry this letter to my whore.' The servant, not surprisingly, looks somewhat agitated. That, though, is the only hint that the beau owes some responsibilities to him. It also says much about attitudes to blacks at the time that the beau can call his former lover a 'whore' to his black servant's face.

'All the Bubbles: The Bubble Companies' was advertised as follows in the *Post Boy* of 20 Oct. 1720:

> This day is Publish'd A New Pack of Playing Cards containing fifty two Copper-Cuts wherein are represented as many several Bubbles, with a satyrical Epigram upon each card, applicable thereunto; The Lines by the Author of South-Sea Ballard and Tippling Philosophers: The Cards made of Superfine Paper and engrav'd by an able Artist; spotted with the proper Colours so that they maybe play'd with as well as Common Cards.[12]

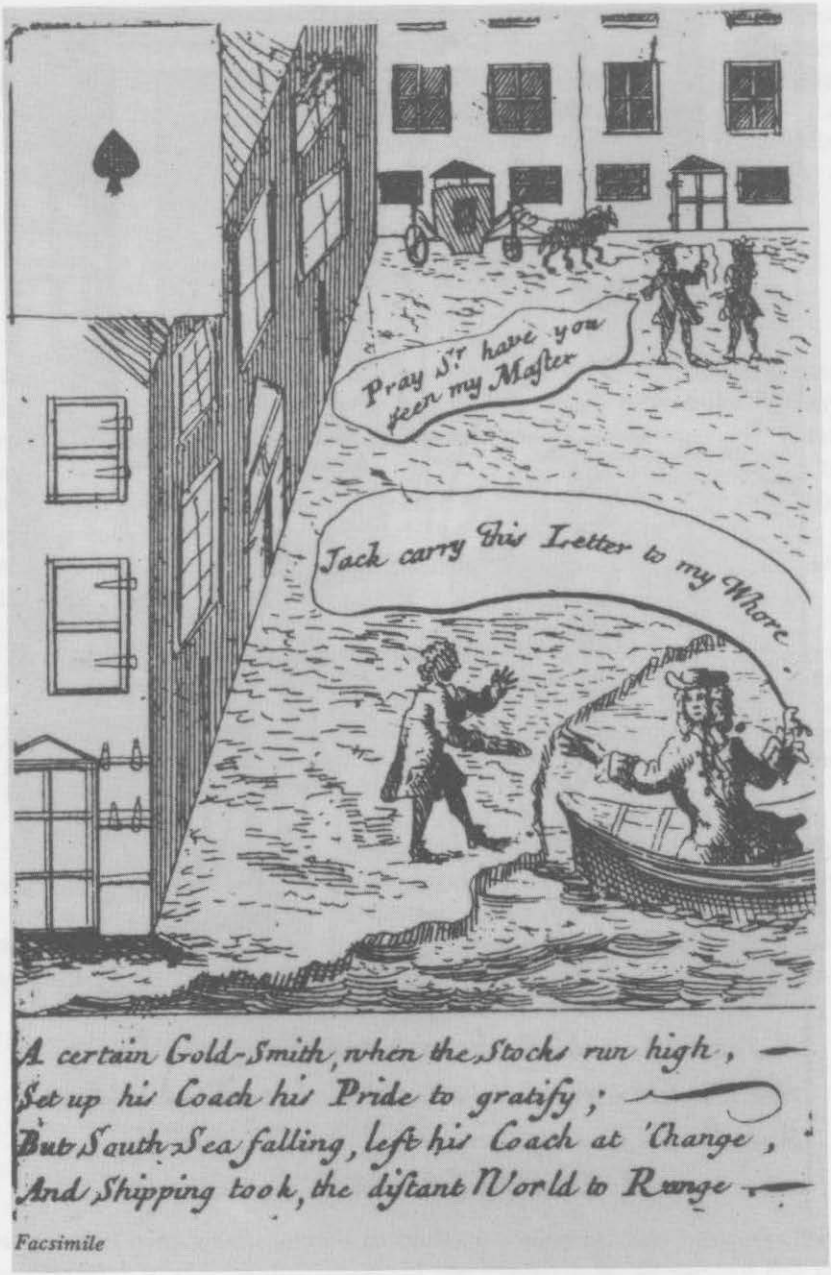
As this pack concentrates on the fraudulent companies rather than the greed of the share-holders themselves, one would expect some comment on the slave-trade, but only the queen of hearts has anything to say about it. The card illustrates 'Cureing Tobacco for Snuff'. It depicts two slaves sifting the weed for snuff, with one of them poignantly rubbing his irritated eyes, and an overseer apparently about to sneeze.

The caption reads as follows:

> Here Slaves for Snuff, are sifting Indian Weed,
> Whilst their O'erseer, does the Riddle feed,
> The Dust arising, gives the Eyes much trouble,
> To shew their Blindness that Espouses the Bubble.

How far this card was intended to criticize the moral blindness of those who invested in companies based on the slave-trade, or merely the inadvisability of investing in snuff as a short-lived fad or even a noxious self-indulgence is difficult to determine but the two slaves appear to be

Ill. 7: Knave of Hearts



Ill. 8: Ace of Spades

Ill. 9: Queen of Hearts

sympathetically portrayed. Wittingly or unwittingly, nevertheless, the queen of hearts in this pack makes the most direct comment on the actual economic source of the South Sea Bubble.

TRANSFORMATION CARDS

In the nineteenth century Africans featured prominently in 'Transformation' cards, but in a debased manner largely absent from Restoration and eighteenth-century cards. 'Transformation' cards, according to Sylvia Mann, 'derived from the idea of "transforming" an ordinary pip card into a wider picture, it being one of the rules that the pips must form part of the overall design and also remain in their original position on the card'. Unlike educational cards, 'transformation' packs were essentially rather frivolous and, according to the same authority, 'It is quite probable that this artistic exercise began in a humble way as a late 18th century parlour game, possibly English in origin, in which competitors vied with each other to produce the most interesting or artistic design'.[13] They were very popular throughout Europe, especially in the early years of the nineteenth century. According to an American authority, however, 'The English, who are supposed to lack a proper sense of humour, have far the cleverest of these to be found in any country'.[14] They resemble, in fact, visual equivalents of the 'ethnic' joke, from which a racialist element never lurks very far.

One of the worst examples is the five of clubs in a pack designed and published in 1811 by I.L.S. Cowell. It portrays 'The Hottentot Venus/ Showing her agility'. The card depicts two leering military figures behind her, and two in front of her (they wear four of the clubs as hats) as she performs on stage. Her performance consists of playing a banjo, which is the fifth club, while wiggling a particularly large part of her anatomy. Even the institution of slavery in the American South was regarded as sufficiently normal to provide a context for crude jokes - and this at the height of the anti-slavery movement in Britain. This is evident in the similar, and no doubt rival, pack published by S. & J. Fuller, also in 1811. It presents the following exchange between slave and overseer:

> 'Sambo, you can not have counted all those stones in ten minutes.'
> 'Yes Masse me have dere ten hundred fifty thousand million. Massa if you no believe count em. Massa count em yourself.'

Less virulent, but also inspired by slavery, were some of the 'transformation' cards designed by the novelist William Makepeace Thackeray

Ill. 10: Five of Clubs

for his own amusement, and posthumously published in *The Orphan of Pimlico* (1876). Thackeray had met blacks on his visits to America, but only as slaves. He concluded a revealing letter from New York, and dated 5 Sept. 1848, for instance, this way: 'But here the first gong sounds for dinner, and the black slave who waits on one comes up and says, "Massa! hab only five minutes for dinnah! Make haste. Get no pumpkin-pie else." So unwillingly I am obliged to break off my note...'[15] His cards, however, employ American blacks derived not from life but from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* 'humorously' to re-design traditional suits. Thus, in the five of spades, 'Lubbly Lucy Neal' earnestly plays the piano for two white men. Her puffy face with a wide mouth makes up the central spade; her hands, and hats worn by the whites, the outer ones. The caption for the three of hearts, which is horizontal, like a stage set in design, informs us that 'Little Eva is crying in the corner'. An overseer wielding a whip in the same card bullies Uncle Tom mercilessly. His face forms a heart with a cigar sticking out from its pointed edge, and the faces of Little Eva and Uncle Tom are also hearts. Like all of Thackeray's card designs, the three of hearts seems more of a *jeu d'esprit* than a comment against slavery. In that vein, Thackeray excelled himself in 'Dandy Jim of Souf Caroline', which graces the two of spades.

On the eve of the American Civil War, and black emancipation, 'Dandy Jim' crystallized the metamorphosis of the African in European eyes from dignified 'noble savage' to feckless, rootless alien, even if an amusing one.

CONCLUDING TRUMP

Geographical playing-cards and the 'Transformation' packs of the nineteenth century very much reflect changing attitudes towards Africa and Africans in Britain from the Restoration to the Victorian period. There was virtually a sea-change from a sense of wonder to one of cultural superiority. The Winstanley packs portrayed Africans as an early version of the 'noble savage' myth. They constitute a unique blend of pictorial artistry and egraved 'factual' information which had, unlike the Lenthall packs, no real successors or imitators. Moreover, they appear to be designed to be 'read' in sequence. Africa in these cards emerges as timeless, exotic and dotted with precarious European outposts. They portray the African as man in the 'state of Nature', but with some ambivalence, as sometimes the African couples look less like 'noble savages' than Hobbesian defenders of their own territory. Less pictorial,

Ill. 11: Two of Spades

and more purely cartographical, Lenthall cards, and their successors and imitators, retained the 'noble savage' image in the knave of spades.

While both types of geographical packs were designed to arouse curiosity and a desire to learn, 'Transformation' cards had no instructive or pedagogical purpose, and probably reinforced racial prejudice. Africans in these cards are represented as grotesque caricatures of 'the Negro's' physical traits and supposed lack of moral stature. It could be argued that Europeans were caricatured just as much, or that the cards were basically frivolous, and therefore not to be taken too seriously, but their implicit acceptance of slavery, evident even in Thackeray's designs, reveals their basic racialism.

The Wallis pack of 1803 could be considered as a collateral descendant of the Winstanley cards in its creative designs and instructive purpose, which was reinforced by the elimination of suits. Though less racialist than the 'Transformation' packs, however, it nevertheless portrays Africans as either cringing slaves or, at best, flamboyant, lion-hunting barbarians.

In the Lenthall pack and its successors and imitators it was generally the face-cards which were most significant in the 'African' suits. Consequently only the knave, usually of spades, portrayed 'A Negro' or genuine African. The other suits portrayed legendary rulers. This tradition continued with the face-suits of nineteenth-century geographical packs, either in terms of colourful Romantic fantasy, as in the Hodges pack of 1827, or as 'imperial' packs. Significantly, the latter eliminated Africans altogether, and replaced them by European colonial figures, as in 'Mrs Farwell's Geographical Whist'.

The change in European attitudes to Africans is perhaps most starkly illuminated by a comparison of the frontispiece that was issued with the Winstanley cards, and the wrapper which adorned 'Mrs Farwell's Geographical Whist'. The frontispiece depicts four royal figures drawing attention to Winstanley's introduction to the cards, and holding a curtain suspended from a geographical globe. It is a grandiose, and suitably baroque design in which the African stands out. He is the lower right-hand figure holding a parasol but, unlike the others, he looks away and does not wear a crown. Consequently, of the four, he looks least royal. He also differs from the others in wearing what appears to be a Roman tunic rather than Stuart attire. Nevertheless, though he does not wear a crown, or wield a sceptre as the allegorical woman representing Europe does, his costume lends him a kind of classical dignity. By contrast, 'Mrs Farwell' banishes the only genuine African in her pack to the wrapper. The African points humbly to his own continent, while an American Indian and Turk smoking a pipe look on. A helmeted Britannia holding a trident presides benignly over the scene.

This represents a radical demotion of the image of Africans in European eyes compared to the allegorical but dignified black figure in Winstanley's frontispiece.

NOTES

1. Virginia Wayland, *The Winstanley Geographical Cards* (Pasadena, 1967), p. 2.
2. Sylvia Mann, *Collecting Playing Cards* (New York, 1966), p. 120.
3. Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock and Other Poems*, edited by Geoffrey Tillotson, 3rd edition (London, 1962), p. 172.
4. Ibid., pp. 173-74.
5. Sylvia Mann, *Collecting English Playing-Cards* (London, 1978), p. 14.
6. Wayland, op. cit., p. 3.
7. Ibid., p. 10.
8. *Shorter Novels of the Seventeenth Century*, edited by Philip Henderson (London, 1930), p. 154.
9. H.T. Morley, *Old and Curious Playing Cards* (London, 1931), p. 133.
10. Ibid., p. 134.
11. J.R.S. Whiting, *A Handful of History* (Dursley, 1978), p. 164.
12. Ibid., p. 174.
13. Information sheet published with facsimile 'Transformation Cards' in association with Guildhall Library (London, 1978).
14. Catherine Perry Hargrave, *A History of Playing Cards* (New York, 1966), p. 214.
15. William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Orphan of Pimlico* (London, 1876), no pagination. Some of Thackeray's card designs are also illustrated on p. 218 of the Hargrave volume noted above.

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